

## Gardening with Children

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When gardening with children, it's important to encourage use of all the senses.

- For touch, experience plants that are soft, such as lamb's ears (*Stachys*); prickly, like pumpkin on a stick (*Solanum integrifolium*); and stickiness of the native hedge apple (*Maclura pomifera*).
- When it comes to fragrance, we often think of flowers, but leaves and fruit are fair game too. Black walnut (*Juglans*) leaves and nuts have a distinct pungency that helps with identification.
- Encourage appreciation of sound as wind moves through tall grasses or causes rattling of the pods of false indigo (*Baptisia*).
- Set up your own taste test by pairing store-bought strawberries against their juicy fresh-from-the-garden counterparts so children know what food should really taste like.
- We use the sense of sight all the time but many of those times we fail to really SEE things. Engage children in the search for the wishbone at the center of wishbone flower (*Torenia*) or counting the number of pollinators on a wildflower.

Consider planting a themed garden to mix things up and add some fun:

- An alphabet garden can be made up of both food and ornamental plants ("a" is for alyssum, "b" is for beans, etc.)
- A zoo garden features plants that have an animal in their name. Some fun plants are zebra grass (*Miscanthus*), hen and chicks (*Sempervivum*), and pigsqueak (*Bergenia*).
- Grow cilantro, tomatoes, hot peppers and onions in a circular garden (to mimic the round shape of a tortilla) to make a salsa garden.
- Plant a pizza garden by growing basil, tomatoes, sweet peppers and onions. Then have a pizza-making party!
- A three sisters garden is named for the Native American tradition of planting corn, beans and squash together because they benefit one another. Corn supports the beans as they climb, beans provide nitrogen (a needed plant nutrient), and squash keeps everyone's roots cool.

Gardening with children passes along science disguised as hands-on fun. This age old tradition creates a new generation of gardeners who can grow their own food and have an appreciation for the green world around them.